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Representative Patricia Lantz
Fall Education Update
26th Legislative District



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Committees
• Judiciary, Chair
• Capital Budget
• Healthcare

Dear neighbors,

It's an honor and a privilege to serve as your representative. I appreciated hearing from many of you during the session and hope that you will continue to share your views and concerns with me.

Once again it is that time of year. Summer is over and students, parents and teachers are getting ready to start another school year.

Over the past decade there have been many changes to our public schools. Parents, teachers, and public officials have been working hard to improve a system that has faces ever increasing demands.

As all of these new pieces have been put in place, it's been hard for parents and grandparents to keep up with the many reforms that have been made.

This legislative report is a current update on some of the changes that are happening in our public schools. Please enjoy—and do not hesitate to contact me with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Patricia Lantz
State Representative
26th Legislative District

Early Learning

A child's early years are a time of tremendous growth and development, and their early learning experiences have profound implications for their later success in school and in life.

Researchers tell us we have it backwards. The older a child gets, the more we spend on their education. It costs about \$6,000 a year to educate a child from elementary school through high school. A year at UW or Western costs roughly \$10,000 a year. But investing a little money from birth to age five actually gives us the best return on our money.

Thirty percent of children are behind from the day they start kindergarten and many never catch up. This year I sponsored The Early Learning Act which creates an Early Learning



Council in the Governor's Office to help improve the quality of care across the state.

The reform is strongly supported by business leaders and foundations that are asking for the opportunity to be partners with the state to improve early learning. I look forward to working with the Council on ways to better organize and deliver quality services to young children in care.

Did You Know?

Brain development and education

- Once a child reaches age three, 85-90% of his or her core brain structure has been formed.
- Between the ages of one and four, children develop the capacity to understand logic and mathematical concepts.

Source: Wisconsin Council on Children & Families

Early Learning
Community Forum

Parents, Teachers and Business Leaders have increasingly become aware of the importance of early childhood development. To help raise awareness on this issue I am organizing a forum to help educate parents and the community on resources that are available to them as well as tips on how to make sure your children are prepared to enter school.

Together we will be examining the question, "What would our schools and community look like if every child came to school prepared?" Please join us for an information packed evening.

When:
Monday,
October 17th

Time:
6:30pm to 8:30pm

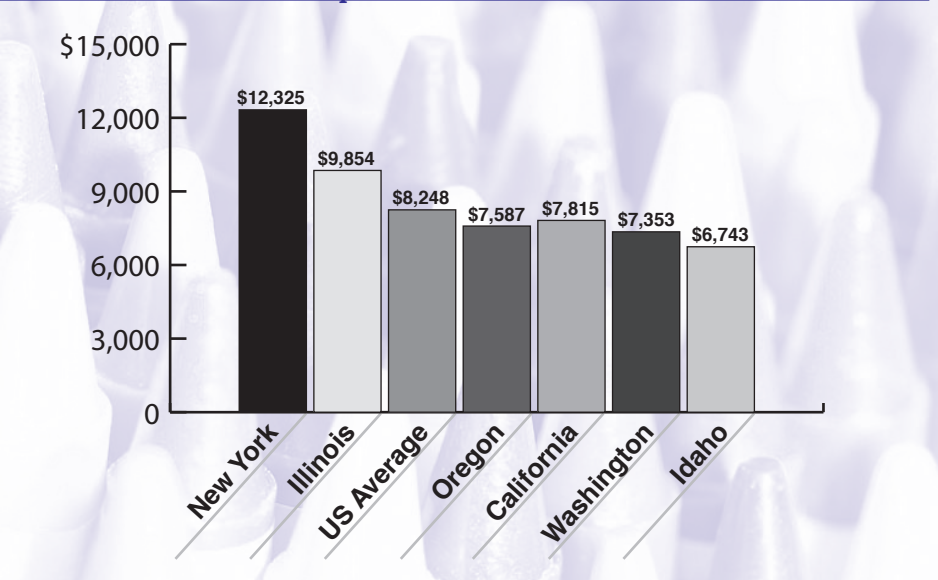
Where:
The Norm Dicks
Government Center
345 6th Street,
Bremerton

Representative Patricia Lantz • Fall Education Update

The Challenge Facing our Schools

In the 2003-04 school year approximately one million students attended one of the 2,200 public schools across the state. For the 2003-05 biennium the Legislature devoted \$10.2 billion, or 43.7 percent, of the state general fund for the support and operation of K-12 public schools. As depicted in the chart below, Washington's per student spending of \$7,579 ranked 31st compared to the other states in the 2003-04 school year.

Public School Current Expenditures Per Student School Year 2003-04



Source: Rankings & Estimates, National Education Association, June 2005

Further, the national average for student enrollment per teacher is 15.7. Washington ranks as the 5th highest in the nation at 19.1 per student. The question we must ask ourselves is “how do we improve?” The problem won’t be solved by simply throwing more money at our schools. Funding is a problem that must be addressed. But part of the answer lies in setting standards, finding ways to effectively prepare students, and making sure that all of parts of our educational system are working together cohesively. Over the past decade the legislature has enacted many different reforms. In this report you will find a summary of what is being done to reshape our educational system.

Bringing the System together

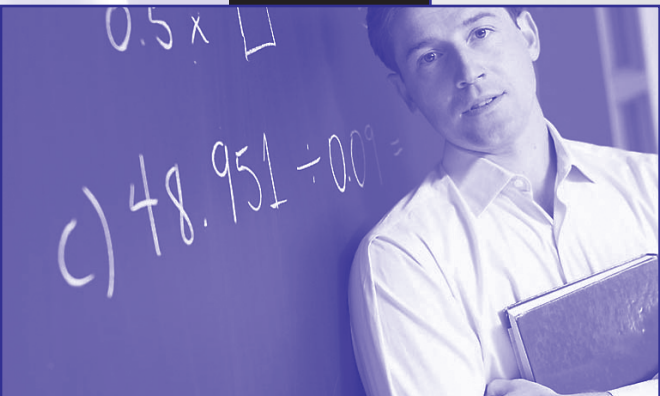
Often our educational system does things backwards. Schools devote greater resources and the best teachers to our high school seniors while studies show that those who struggle the most are students who are transitioning between elementary, middle school, and high school.

So how do we get all the parts of our educational system to work together? How should we decide where to spend our resources? This year the Legislature created a bi-partisan Governor’s Council to examine the way we finance all our levels of education. The council is composed of local educators, business leaders, community activists, and government officials who are working together to answer the following questions:

1. Is Washington using its existing education resources efficiently?
2. What defines the quality that citizens want in early learning, K-12 schools and higher education?
3. What needs to change to achieve the quality we all want?



Students at Kitsap Lake Elementary School. Photo courtesy of Bremerton School District.



Classroom Based Assessments

Not every student learns the same. That’s why I fought for legislation (HB 2195) that created a pilot project to help strike the proper balance between the need for accountability and the desire for creativity and flexibility as we assess students’ readiness to graduate. This new program creates a viable alternative to the WASL to help students who may not test well.

Classroom based assessments (CBAs) seek to engage students in meaningful projects that require an understanding of the arts, physical education, civics, economics, history, etc. to help ensure these important subjects are not pushed aside. The WASL helps to create greater accountability in our schools but it is vital that we give students and teachers the flexibility to explore alternative means of learning.

Increased Funding for Education

As a mother and grandmother, I know the importance of quality schools. Not only are they important to the success of our children, they help attract quality businesses to the Puget Sound region.

Operating Budget

The 2005 Legislature dramatically improved support for public schools, which will significantly help students and teachers, ultimately improving our children’s likelihood of future success.

- After two years of being suspended due to lack of funds, the people’s teacher-salary and class-size initiatives (I-728 & I-732) are fully funded for 2005-07.

- New Learning Assistance Program reforms will help 26th District schools by targeting funding to school with large numbers of low-income families.
- Special Education funding reforms also benefit local schools.

Overall, the 2005 Legislature increased state funding for Washington’s public schools by \$981 million – about \$468 per student. I’m grateful to the P.T.A., teachers, concerned parents and others who supported our efforts to make 2005 a great year for children and public schools.

Capital Budget

A record investment of \$600 million will fund emergency repairs, modernization and new construction for K-12 schools throughout the state. This money includes \$1.7 million for renovations at Harbor Ridge Middle School in the Peninsula School district.

Locally, we received over \$43 million for the construction of a new humanities and student services building at Olympic College, \$600,000 for renovation of the Bremer Center, and just under \$32 million for the construction of a new science building at Tacoma Community College.

I sponsored legislation that will generate as much as \$180 million in additional state support for local school construction needs. By forcing the state to step up to the plate, it is my hope that we will get some much needed relief for local property-tax payers.

WASL Requirements; creating a certificate of achievement

What will happen in 2008?

Legislators have heard a rising level of concern among parents and educators about the high school class of 2008 – the first to be required to pass the 10th grade WASL in order to graduate.

Why are we insisting that students meet academic standards?

In 1983 the publication of “A Nation at Risk” raised the alarm about the inadequacy of our schools. At that time, we had no academic standards. Students who earned straight D’s marched across the stage to receive their high school diplomas side by side with students who earned straight A’s. Employers complained that a high school diploma meant nothing, and that many graduates couldn’t even fill out a job application.

What will happen to students who don’t pass the 10th grade WASL?

Last year the Legislature enacted substantial changes to provide a safety net for students who don’t pass the 10th grade WASL on their first try:

- Students take the WASL in the spring of their sophomore year. They will be given four additional opportunities to retake the test during their junior and senior years.

- The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is working on developing alternative assessments – that is, other ways for students to prove they know how to read, write and do math at the levels represented by the 10th grade WASL.
- In the future, students who don’t pass earlier WASL’s in the 4th and 7th grade will get more focused attention to prepare them by the time they reach 10th grade.
- Many special education students will be exempt from the WASL requirement.

How has the Legislature helped?

Increases in the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) address the need to boost WASL scores. The extra funding will help schools offer summer school and after-school tutoring to help students meet standards. These changes will help prepare our schools for next spring, when the high school graduating class of 2008 will take the test as sophomores. The combination of tutoring, four retakes and “alternative assessments” will give our students the means to succeed.